

Island with the recreation consultant for the project (see Appendix A) and one of the project technical monitors. Discussions have been held with the technical monitors at various points during the project.

C. Description of Smith Island

Smith Island is the southernmost point of North Carolina. Located in Brunswick County at the mouth of Cape Fear River, it is about 22 miles south of Wilmington and three miles east across the river from Southport. The Island is shaped somewhat like a thin triangle, getting its common name, Bald Head, from the exposed beach and dunes at the south-western corner. As shown in Figure 1, Smith Island is actually a complex of small islands, creeks, and marshes. Of the total of about 10,900 acres, some 2,580-2,700 acres are high land. The rest is submerged land and salt marsh, ownership of which is claimed by the State.

The southwest coast of Smith Island is paralleled by a high sand ridge, (the Great Ridge), approximately three miles long. The area behind this ridge and a strip behind the eastern beach, approximately six and one-half miles in length, comprises a marine forest. This forest, protected from the wind and ocean by the dune system, contains a stand of live oaks and sabal palmetto. In discussing Smith Island, the National Park Service (1955) seashore recreation study reported "In only a few limited areas [on the Atlantic coast] are there remnants of forests which . . . can be still recognized as parts of the primitive, native forests" (Quoted in Cooper and Satterthwaite, 1964:14). The Island is the northern limit for the sabal palmetto.

Smith Island plays an important part in the preservation of the Atlantic loggerhead turtle. These giant sea turtles have long used the Island's beaches to lay their eggs; as undisturbed coastal areas for nesting grow rare, the loggerhead is becoming uncommon. The Island has also been the home of the Florida wood rat. The nearest coastal population of this species is over two hundred miles south (Cooper and Satterthwaite, 1964:21) and its existence on Smith Island is unusual and deserves scientific study.

The salt marsh (3400 acres), creeks and bays (3250 acres), and shallow river water (1550 acres) provide a rich environment for marine life. These areas total 8200 acres and are mostly all below mean high water. Most of